

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 EA-10 ISO-00 IO-13 CIAE-00 DODE-00
PM-05 H-01 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01
PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 AID-05 CEA-01 COME-00
EB-08 FRB-03 OPIC-03 TRSE-00 LAB-04 SIL-01
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P R 291030Z SEP 77
FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8285
INFO USUN NEW YORK 711
AEMBASSY CANBERRA 186
AEMBASSY LONDON 1165
AEMBASSY OTTAWA 103
AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON
AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
AMEMBASSY RANGOON
AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU
AMEMBASSY JAKARTA
AMEMBASSY TOKYO
AMEMBASSY MANILA
AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR
AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE
AMEMBASSY SEOUL
AMEMBASSY KABUL
AMEMBASSY TEHRAN
AMEMBASSY DACCA
AMEMBASSY SUVA
AMEMBASSY PORT MORESBY

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E.O. 11652: N/A
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TAGS PORTG, EAID, OCON, CE
SUBJECTA: POLITICAL LIABILITY TO USG REFUSAL TO HOST 1978 COLOMBO
PLAN MINISTERIAL MEETING

1. SUMMARY: THE USG IS ALREADY PAYING A POLITICAL PRICE FOR
ITS FAILURE TO RESPOND TO THE REQUEST MADE EARLY THIS
YEAR TO HOST THE 1978 COLOMBO PLAN MEETING. THE BENEFITS

TO OUR AID PROGRAMS OF HOSTING THE 1978 MEETING WOULD NOT BE GREAT. HOWEVER, THE POLITICAL COST OF NOT HOSTING IT WOULD BE CONSIDERABLE. OTHER COUNTRIES ARE ALREADY MISINTERPRETING OUR FAILURE TO RESPOND AS INDICATING THE US NO LONGER SUPPORTS REGIONAL COOPERATION IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT. THE NEW PRIME MINISTER OF SRI LANKA HAS TAKEN A PUBLIC PERSONAL INTEREST IN THE COLOMBO PLAN. OUR REFUSAL TO HOST NEXT YEAR'S MEETING WOULD BE AN UNNECESSARY SLAP AT THE NEW GOVERNMENT. WE THEREFORE URGE THE DEPARTMENT PROMPTLY TO EXTEND USG INVITATIONS FOR THE 1978 MEETING.END SUMMARY.

2. SINCE THE COLOMBO PLAN DIRECTOR HERE SIX MONTHS AGO REQUESTED THE US TO HOST THE 1978 MINISTERIAL CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE MEETING, WE REPEATEDLY URGED FAVORABLE CONSIDERATION. AT THIS STAGE OUR LACK OF RESPONSE HAS BECOME INCREASINGLY NOTICABLE TO THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE OTHER MEMBER COUNTRIES. THE NEW PRIME MINISTER, J.R. JAYAWARDENA, CONSIDERS HIMSELF ONE OF THE FOUNDING FATHERS OF THE COLOMBO PLAN AND MADE AN UNUSUAL PERSONAL APPEARANCE AT A ROUTINE COLOMBO PLAN GATHERING TO PUBLICLY RESTATE HIS PERSONAL INTEREST AND SUPPORT FOR THE PLAN. IT IS OUR VIEW THAT THE QUESTION OF THE US HOSTING OF THE 1978 MEETING HAS ALREADY ASSUMED A POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL IMPORTANCE.

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3. THE COLOMBO PLAN IS NOT OF MAJOR IMPORTANCE TO OUR BILATERAL AND MULTILATERAL AID PROGRAMS. HOWEVER, IT HAS BEEN A USEFUL FORUM FOR THE DISCUSSION OF DEVELOPMENT PROBLEMS. CONCURRENTLY IT IS A CHANNEL FOR USG FUNDS INTO THE REGION TO FULFILL OUR PRIORITY NARCOTICS PROGRAMS. MOST IMPORTANT IS THAT US PARTICIPATION IN THE PLAN IS SEEN BY ITS ASIAN MEMBERS AS A POSITIVE EXAMPLE OF US INTEREST IN SELF HELP AND REGIONAL COOPERATION IN THEIR DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS. COLOMBO PLAN MEMBERS' PRECEPTION OF US SUPPORT WAS UNDERMINED IN 1975 WHEN THE US BELATEDLY DECLINED TO HOST THE 1976 MEETING. IF WE CONTINUE TO DELAY OUR INVITATION FOR 1978 OR AGAIN DECLINE TO HOST THE MEETING, IT WILL BE TOO LATE TO ARRANGE ANOTHER VENUE. THE 1978 MEETING WOULD THEREFORE HAVE TO BE CANCELLED AS A RESULT OF USG INACTION JUST AS WE TORPEDOED THE 1976 MEETING.

4. COMMENT: OUR UNDERSTANDING OF PRESIDENT CARTER'S STATEMENTS IN REGARD TO WORKING TOGETHER WITH OTHER COUNTRIES TO ASSIST THEIR DEVELOPMENT PROCESS SUGGESTS TO US THAT CONTINUED ACTIVE USG PARTICIPATION IN THE COLOMBO PLAN IS PART OF THIS ADMINISTRATION'S

POLICY. PUT ANOTHER WAY, PRESS INQUIRIES ABOUT A WELL-PUBLICISED CANCELLATION OF 1978 COLOMBO PLAN DELIBERATIONS DUE TO A TARDY US DECISION, FOLLOWING ON THE 1976 "INCIDENT", SEEM UNLIKELY TO ELICIT THE WHITE HOUSE SPOKESMAN'S RESPONSE, THAT THIS IS IN ACCORD WITH THE PRESIDENT'S VIEWS ON THE US ROLE IN THE DEVELOPING WORLD.
WRIGGINS

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